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The White Rose

MEMPHIS.

BY W. C. FALKNER.

CHAPTER XXIII. Concluded.

It was some time after dark when I returned to the house, and found supper waiting for me; but the landlord was very much astonished when I declined to eat any. I excused myself, however, and requested to be shown to a private room. He procured a lighted candle and conducted me up a narrow flight of stairs, and landed me in a small apartment in the corner of the house. A clean looking bed stood in one corner of the room; a washstand, bureau, and two chairs, constituted the furniture. There were two windows—one in the east side, the other in the south—both covered with clean snow-white curtains, nicely looped up from the middle. As soon as I was left alone, I began to let my mind have its own way, and if I were to tell all that it investigated on that occasion, it would add too much to the length of this story. A mocking-bird sat on a tree near the south window and seemed to be exerting himself to amuse me. I like mocking-birds; but this one was "hoarse and singing out of tune." He had cracked his voice trying to imitate about six cats that were holding a camp meeting on top of the smoke house. I might have enjoyed the concert under more favorable circumstances, but the state of my nervous system was such as to deprive me of the pleasure. I needed sleep; in fact I was suffering for lack of sleep, and knew that it was my duty to endeavor to get it at all hazards, so as to enable me to master the situation in which I was placed. The momentous events that were to transpire on the next day were fraught with no little significance, so far as they might result to myself. I threw off my clothes and stretched myself on the bed, first extinguishing the light, and tried to keep my thoughts away from the cat show; but that was a failure. I stood it as long as any man could have done, and would have submitted to the torture perhaps longer, but for my nervousness. I threw a glass tumbler, with unerring precision, and one cat went to his long home, and the concert closed. But alas! I soon made the heart-rending discovery that I had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. The cater-wauling melody was sweet music compared with the heart-rending noise made by the frogs in a pond hard-by. I am willing to admit, that I have always been of the opinion that a congregation of cats could make the most heart-rending soul-scraping noise, that ever was heard; but that night I had cause to change my opinion. I award the premium to the frog; he can beat a cat to death and give him an hour's start. A cat has to stop occasionally to fill his lungs; but not so with the frog; he seems to be all the time full of wind; I suppose he has a manufacturing apparatus in his lungs. At all events, no man ever heard a frog stop for breath when once he made up his mind not to do it. The frog pond about which I am telling was not more than fifty yards from my window. I don't know exactly how many frogs there were in that pond, though it must have been very densely populated, judging from the great noise they made. If frogs were worth a dollar a head, I am confident that there were enough in that pond to pay the national debt not counting the old ones that had retired from business. I inferred that they were holding a convention of some sort; no doubt it was a political meeting, for great confusion seemed to prevail, similar to what I have seen in the carpet-baggers' conventions in Mississippi. Ever now and then, the confusion would burst out anew, and I thought the concern would end in a row; but one old fellow with a bass voice cried out, "hold him, hold him, hold him!" I do not profess, however, to understand frog language, but if that is not what he said I don't know what it was. Occasionally another one with a tenor voice howled, "Shoot him! Shoot him!" But I suppose some one must have held him, for no frog was shot. There were

two little frogs in a puddle near the house, one was grating his teeth all the time, while the other one's feelings seemed to be very much hurt about something, for he was crying like his heart was going to break. I inferred that they had been expelled from the convention; or that they had come off from home and forgot their credentials. I lay and listened to the frogs until my eyes began to feel heavy; and just as I was about to fall asleep in spite of the frog-convention, a musquito concluded to make his supper off of my nose. Sometimes I would actually get into a comfortable doze, when he would light, and begin to put his pumps to work and wake me. I would drive him away; but he would not take the hint. In order to get rid of him, I offered a fair compromise; I was willing that he might pump as much blood out of my feet as he could chamber, and taking them from under the cover I held them out to him, but he rejected my liberal offer with scorn, and seemed to have made up his mind to fight it out on the nose line; the result was, after a half hour's contest, I killed him, and then I soon fell asleep. It was but natural to suppose that my slumbers would be disturbed by unpleasant dreams. How could any thing else be expected, harassed as my mind was with such unpleasant reflections. I dreamed of war, blood, and duels, and a thousand other things too tedious to mention; but I must tell you of two of my dreams: I first dreamed that I was a young tadpole, swimming about in the pond among the frogs. I was very proud of my beautiful tail, and imagined that all the frogs were dying with envy, because they had lost theirs. It never had occurred to me that at no distant day I should lose my tail, and be reduced to an equality with the frogs. I was dashing about among the frogs, and switching my tail in their faces, in a very rude manner. The fact is I was tantalizing them for being out of fashion. I had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of a celebrated frog, who was famous for his courage, and who possessed, an ungovernable temper. I trust that my friends will not be disposed to censure me for describing such a ridiculous dream; but I am telling exactly what did occur, and not what ought to have occurred. In the first place, it will be well to remember the circumstances by which I was surrounded. I was about to be forced into a duel, with a man against whom I bore no ill-will, and one whom I was determined not to hurt. Then I was full of perplexity, because I did not know the cause that had induced him to challenge me. While my mind was completely unsettled by these unpleasant reflections, I was trying to steal a little sleep, in order that I might be in a condition to wrestle with the situation on the next day. Then it was a natural consequence, that I should dream of duels, Tomcats, and frogs. Especially when it is remembered that the cats and frogs had conspired to keep me awake, and when in spite of them, I did fall asleep.

But let me go on with my strange dream. When I had been so inconsiderate as to flirt my tail against the nose of the high-tempered frog, I discovered, when it was too late, that I had involved myself in a serious difficulty; and hoping to escape the consequences, I sought refuge behind an old rotten log that lay in the edge of the pond. I was very much alarmed when I saw a large number of frogs collecting round the one whose nose I had so imprudently slapped with my tail. A little timid tadpole swam up close to me and very meekly informed me that I was in great danger, as I had insulted the most dangerous frog in the pond. I was very much disturbed by this information and was preparing an apology to be sent, when I received a message from the insulted frog. To the best of my recollection, it was in substance as follows:

"General Frog presents his compliments to Col. Tadpole and begs to say that, while bathing in his own precinct, a gross insult was offered him by Col. Tadpole, who wantonly flouted his tail in General Frog's face. General Frog, therefore, has the honor to request Col. Tadpole to designate a time and place when and where such satisfaction can be had as is recognized by the code.—Gen. Frog designates the bearer of this message as his friend, who is

authorized to arrange preliminaries."

I am free to confess that I was completely paralyzed with fear when I received this message, as would have made an honorable apology, but the bearer refused to listen to reason. He demanded blood; and swore that if I refused to fight, that I was a dead Tadpole certain. I was about to faint from sheer cowardice, when a bold young Tadpole whispered in my ear:

"Put on a bold front," said he, Gen. Frog is a humbug and a bully. Accept his challenge, make him fight with sticks, six inches long and a half inch in diameter; let the sticks be sharpened at one end. A frog always has his mouth open, and you can run your stick down his throat, and kill him while he is trying to get a fair lick at your head."

I acted on this advice, and being the challenged party, I had the right to choose the weapon. Quite a commotion was caused when it became known that a duel was to be fought between Gen. Frog and Col. Tadpole.

The weapons were prepared, the space in the water was measured, an ominous silence pervaded the pond, (a thing that had never happened before); we were placed eighteen inches apart, and when we were ordered to take our places, I could see plainly that public sentiment was against me among the frogs; but every tadpole in the pond was on my side. When the word was given, I made a dash forward and plunged my stick down Gen. Frog's throat, taking him completely by surprise. The General's friends carried him off of the field, but he was a dead frog; and when it was announced that the great General Frog was dead, such a heart-rending wail as rent the air then, never had been heard in the Frog Kingdom before. The unusual noise awoke me, and I was glad to find it was all a dream, and that I was not really a tadpole. I got up, lighted the candle, kissed Lottie's picture a dozen times, looked at my watch and found that I had only slept an hour. After pacing the floor for half an hour, I again threw myself on the bed, and soon was dreaming again. While the second dream was not so full of nonsense as the first one, it was pregnant with unpleasantness. It was what I call a business-like dream—short, to the point. I thought I and Wallingford had failed to reach a reconciliation, and that General Calloway announced to me that I must fight. We fought with pistols at ten paces, and I was killed at the first fire. I suffered all the agonies of death; and as soon as my soul left the body his Satanic Majesty stood ready to take me into custody. I remember exactly how he looked; he had his Aide de Camp with him. They had hand-cuffs and chains to fasten my limbs. They took me down through a long space of exceeding darkness, when all at once my eyes were blinded by the bright flames that broke on my view. I started up and awoke, and saw two rough looking men standing over me—while one held a candle the other had a pair of hand-cuffs in his hand.

"Get up, sir, and put on your clothes as soon as you can; we want you to go with us."

I did as I was ordered—asking no questions. The first thing that occurred to me was that the civil authority had ordered my arrest, so as to prevent the duel; and to be candid I was very glad of it. Any thing to prevent the duel suited me; for I hated the idea of being shot at merely to gratify a foolish whim of Harry Wallingford. When I finished my toilet, one of the men locked the hand-cuffs on my wrists, and then commanded me to follow them. Under any other circumstances, I dare say, I should have knocked any man down, who attempted to manacle me; but I was willing to submit to any indignity and endure any inconvenience that would prevent the duel. I followed the officers submissively and silently, being satisfied that my imprisonment would only be temporary. I would be set at liberty as soon as my friends could arrange to make a bond. The officers put me in a buggy and began to drive rapidly towards Hernando. We arrived there a short time before day-break; when I was placed on a train and was soon moving rapidly towards Grenada. I was unable to account for this. Why should I be carried out of the country, where I

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R. F. FORD, Editor and Publisher.

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